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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA WELCOMES NATO SUMMIT STATEMENT,

ACKNOWLEDGES NEED FOR FURTHER REFORMS

¶11. (SBU) In a telcon November 30, MFA State Secretary Igor Ilievski told P/E Chief the GOM was delighted with the NATO Summit statement at Riga announcing, *inter alia*, the Alliance's intent to "extend further invitations to those countries who meet NATO's performance based standards..." The government also was very pleased with President Bush's public statement of support for NATO enlargement in 2008. In a letter to President Bush dated November 30 (septel), Prime Minister Gruevski thanked the President and the people of the United States for backing Macedonia's NATO membership aspirations, and reiterated Macedonia's appreciation for the 2004 decision to recognize Macedonia's constitutional name.

¶12. (U) On December 1, PM Gruevski issued a public statement thanking NATO member states and President Bush for encouraging Macedonia and its citizens to accelerate the implementation of NATO MAP-required reforms. Although he stated that the Riga documents "show that Macedonia, Croatia and Albania will become NATO members" in 2008, Gruevski also noted the need to complete remaining tasks, and underscored that NATO membership should be "deserved," and not a "gift." He characterized the Riga Summit statement as a "stimulus" for enhancing Macedonia's position as a NATO membership contender, which would help raise living standards and improve government performance.

¶13. (SBU) Speaking to the DCM at a November 29 "Riga Summit" luncheon for NATO embassy representatives, Defense Minister Elenovski expressed his great appreciation for U.S. support for Macedonia's NATO aspirations and, perhaps caught up in the positive mood after reading the Riga Declaration, indicated that a 2008 invitation seemed very likely. DCM acknowledged the progress made to date by the GOM, and by the Defense Ministry in particular, but cautioned the Minister that much work remained to be done on the reform agenda, and that time was short. Elenovski agreed and said he would work to prevent the GOM from prematurely congratulating itself.

¶14. (U) Local press reaction was generally positive and balanced, highlighting the strong likelihood of NATO enlargement in 2008 and noting the need for continued progress on reforms to improve Macedonia's chances of receiving a membership invitation. An editorial in one respected Macedonian daily suggested that Macedonia should not be "euphoric" about the Riga statement, but should instead concentrate on "finishing its homework" for NATO

membership. Former PM Buckovski, writing in another daily, asserted that "following the Riga declaration...it (remains) for us to demonstrate that we understand our priorities and how to accomplish them.."

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The Riga Declaration and President Bush's statement have had a salutary effect, boosting public and government confidence vis-a-vis NATO membership. While some officials occasionally lapse into over-confidence regarding a 2008 invitation, most understand the government has many remaining tasks, and little time in which to complete them, before it can count on a membership invitation. We will continue to work with the government to keep them focused on needed reforms, including combating corruption and trafficking in persons, using the post-Riga positive momentum here to press the GOM to accelerate the entire reform implementation process.

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